



by Tyler Fish

“How are you going to be happy?”, spouted a 5th grader from the back row.

Wow, that is basically one of the most important questions in life.

Lately, I've been visiting 5th grade classes. Getting ready for a school presentation I think about the students, the teachers, the props and the paperwork and the little details. I don't always think about the questions that are going to come up at the end, so when the sea of 5th grade hands rises, I'm not always ready. Here are three examples of the types of questions I've received.

1. Worse case scenarios. These don't surprise me and are ultimately not that interesting, except for the creativity in designing the situation. “What if you are swimming in the open water, and your dry suit leaks, and then a polar bear comes and...the other guy isn't there and...” Obviously at some point I'm force to admit that it just might be hopeless. But there are lesser degrees of this question. If we feel tired or have a cold, we will keep going. Minor injuries will treated as best as possible. We have to do the best with what we have.

2. “How do you brush your teeth?” This question is very similar to “how do you go to the bathroom,” or “how do you wash your clothes?” I enjoy the variations on this theme. To me this question is really something like, how do you take care of yourself when the conditions are, at best, uncomfortable? John and I won't be miserable the whole time. In fact, we enjoy the routines of taking care of ourselves. It's not about going without; rather, it's about how can we adapt and be normal human beings? I brush my teeth and floss twice a day, if possible. Showers turn into sponge baths. Life is good. These simple acts help me feel that I have control of my situation, that I can rely on myself.

3. “Are you doing this to inspire people?” This one did catch me off guard. I stared quietly and pleased at this fifth grader, slightly surprised, and quietly replied, “yes.” She then quickly followed that up with, “Did you have people inspire you?” She's good, I thought. I had many teachers and coaches and people that I met on my travels who were doing really incredible things. I encourage kids to experience their world, travel and talk with people, listen to their stories. There are so many amazing individuals out in the world. Let them fill you with curiosity and wonder, and then go do something with it!

If everyone could be as interested and invested in life as a 5th grader, I'm sure the world would be a better place. If nothing else people would go around MUCH more curious about each other. You would hear people on the street asking all sorts of questions that are absent in your everyday life. People don't raise their hands and ask you, “How are you going to be happy?” That's important stuff.